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ESTIMATE OF THE WORLD SITUATION THROUGH 1954

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS. . . . .

I shall give you an estimate of the strength of potentialities of the Soviet Bloc, as well as of the free world, based not solely on CIA information, but also on information from other intelligence agencies of the government.

STALIN'S DEATH

Of course, of paramount interest to all of us has been the somewhat rapid transfer of power in the Soviet Union since the death of Stalin. It is still too early, both in time and developments, to assess fully the impact this important change will have on the world at large.

We do have some tentative conclusions; and there are a few things about the transfer of power that we can state with some reasonable assurance.

In the reorganization of the Soviet Government, Malenkov now apparently holds the same titular position within the Presidium and the Secretariat of the Party and in the Council of Ministers which Stalin held. In the Council of Ministers, power has been concentrated in the hands of Malenkov as Chairman and four First Deputy Chairmen; Beria, Molotov, Bulganin, and Kaganovich. These five men make up the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. It may be significant that this body closely parallels in nature and membership the wartime Committee of State Defense under Stalin. The reorganization has reduced the number and size of party and government bodies and appears to tighten and streamline the administrative system.

The problem of transfer of power is one of the most difficult which the Soviet system could face. The important initial step, the formal transfer of authority, has apparently been effected with remarkable rapidity and precision and suggests an acute awareness on the part of the Soviet leaders of the dangers inherent in the situation. Necessary plans to bring about the change appear to have been prepared, at least in outline, well in advance of Stalin's death.

Malenkov's key position in the Soviet Communist Party throughout the past fourteen years, his conspicuous and apparently planned elevation since 1948, his prominent role at and since the 19th Party Congress of last October, and the glowing description given him by Beria at Stalin's funeral suggest that there will be no immediate challenge to his position. We cannot estimate, however, whether he has the qualities of leadership necessary to consolidate his position and to attain unchallenged power, since he has always operated with the backing of Stalin. Neither is it possible to estimate with confidence the capabilities or probable courses of action of his possible opponents.

A struggle for power could develop within the Soviet hierarchy at any time. Given the nature of the Soviet state, such a struggle would probably be carried on within the Party organization and higher echelons of the bureaucracy. In any case, the peoples of the USSR are unlikely to participate actively in the struggle. Even if a struggle should break out in the near future, we believe that the hold of the Communist Party over the USSR is not likely to be shaken quickly. We do not believe that such a struggle would in itself lead the rulers of the USSR deliberately to initiate general war.

Now, I would like to review some of the probable consequences of Stalin's death within the Soviet Union:

1. The effects on the Bases of Soviet Power. The Economic and military bases of Soviet power — which I shall go into later — are unlikely to be affected immediately by Stalin's death. However, the new leadership may prove less successful in maintaining and strengthening these bases of Soviet power.
2. We believe that the USSR is politically more vulnerable today than before Stalin's death. The new leadership will have difficult policy decisions to face, and these difficulties may be increased by personal rivalries for power which would reduce Soviet strength and the cohesion of the international Communist movement. In the near future, the new Soviet leadership will almost certainly pursue the foreign and domestic policies established during recent years. In particular, it will probably continue to emphasize unrelenting hostility to the West (including the tactic of splitting the West), the enlargement of the economic base of the Bloc, and the increase of Bloc military power.

3. The death of Stalin removes an autocrat who, while ruthless and determined to spread Soviet power, did not allow his ambitions to lead him into reckless courses of action in his foreign policy. It would be unsafe to assume that the new Soviet regime will have Stalin's skill in avoiding general war. At least initially, the regime will also lack his freedom of action and his ability to maneuver, since it will not possess Stalin's immense prestige and authority. Specifically, in foreign policy, the new regime will probably find it more difficult to abandon positions than did Stalin. It might also feel itself compelled to react more strongly if moves of the West confronted it with the need for major decisions. Conversely, the new leadership will probably exercise caution in the near future in taking action which it thought would force the West to make comparable decisions. If the West should suggest re-examination of the principal issues which have divided East and West, the new Soviet government would probably adhere to established Soviet positions. However, the new government would probably show a less sure hand in dealing with new issues or in handling new Western

4. The new Soviet regime probably fears that, while it is in the process of consolidating its power, the West may make aggressive moves against the Bloc. It would probably view with extreme suspicion any new moves made by the West, particularly those involving long-range air forces or military forces close to the Bloc frontiers.

5. The death of Stalin removes the man who had been built up to the status of a demi-god. To many of the people of the USSR, he was the man of steel who had raised Russia to industrial and military power, who had withstood the German attack, and who had led the peoples of the USSR to the greatest military victory in Russian history. Stalin's death will be a psychological shock to large numbers of Soviet people. However, we estimate that this shock in itself will not affect the stability of the new regime.